



Conference Paper

Images of Ethnic Culture as a Component of World-Picture

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Abstract

The article describes the relationships between the concepts of 'world picture' and 'ethnic image'. The author's aim is to explore the influence of world picture on the development of the images of ethnic culture.

Keywords: ethnic culture, mentality, ethnic image, world picture

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1. Introduction

Images of ethnic culture play a highly important role in the development of ethnic identity. Some of these images are transmitted between generations acquiring highly symbolic meaning for an ethnic group. Others not only promote the identification with an ethnic group, but also produce the concepts of other ethnic groups and cultures. Perception of other cultures develops through a certain world picture, social attitudes, values and norms. The relationships between the images of an ethnic culture and a world picture are important to understand and properly comprehend the other cultures.

The relevant literature on ethnic culture includes the works by A.Ya.Flier, S.V.Lur'ye and others. The concepts of *world picture* and *ethnic image* were developed by A.Ya. Gurevich, G.D.Gachev, W.Wundt, W.Lippmann. To understand the nature and characteristics of ethnic identity, it is important to explore the relationships between the concepts of 'world picture', 'mentality', 'ethnic culture', 'ethnic image' and 'ethnic stereotype'.

2. World Picture in Ethnic Cultural Context

World picture is rooted in social and individual consciousness and can be described as a system of concepts describing the reality [4]. Within the context of an ethnic culture, world picture generates a common perception of reality, creates behavioral models for each member of an ethnic group and produces behavioral stereotypes for any given

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situation. Z.D.Popova uses a term “cognitive world picture”, which is an ‘entirety of concepts and stereotypes defined by a culture’ [4].

World picture may be described as a system of images and metaphors of reality. A particularly important role is played by an ethnic image. An important feature of this image is its sensory perception. An ethnic image is a short description of a typical quality ascribed to an ethnic group. Ethnic images are based on various aspects that had played a part in ethnic formation: its territorial, social-historical and cultural characteristics, as well as certain physical features (the issue of race) [7]. Ethnicity is formed based on language and culture, which, in turn, transmit the archetypal images. These images inscribe the ‘us-them’ differences in the historical memory [3].

An image of an ethnic group is defined by the universal values, ethnic characteristics of a civilization (including social norms of behavior and lifestyle), and individual life attitudes [5].

Universal human values include a number of features: respect for the elderly, conformity, diligence, respect of nature, gratitude to a forebear, generosity. Life attitudes in an ethnic group include such categories as ‘life’, ‘death’, ‘love’, ‘past’.

Ethnic characteristics of a civilization include the structures of everyday life based on the dominant activity, type of government, types of dwellings, and a material culture.

The ideas of ‘good’ qualities of a certain ethnic group largely coincide – however, other peoples usually see them through the existing stereotypes. Within a given culture, an ethnic image has an archetypal quality (it is recreated unconsciously) and stability – that is, it is stereotypical. Walter Lippmann highlighted such characteristics of stereotype as: impressions, influence of the social milieu, subjectivity, dependence on cultural context, typification and unconscious character. In order to interpret the behavior of ‘the other’, it is important to understand his/her sociocultural context. However, most of the time ‘the other’ is interpreted based on ‘our own’ perceptions [2]. The researcher connects mentality and stereotypes, noting that the latter are transmitted over generations. At the same time, images and stereotypes are used not only to describe an ‘alien’ culture, but also to describe ‘our own’ culture and ethnic group.

The problem of the formation of ethnic image may be seen through the concept of ‘mentality’ that helps to entrench these images in the collective consciousness. A.Ya.Gurevich proposed a definition of mentality that includes the following structural components: “socio-psychological attitudes, automatisms and habits of consciousness,

worldviews and perceptions of people belonging to a certain socio-cultural community." At the same time, the researcher notes that mentalities have a 'diffused' character – unlike other, more structured, systems, they are expressed in behavior, customs and language, which are usually used unconsciously by the members of the social whole. Despite all this, Gurevich believed that mentality may be described as a constant of "basic concepts held by the people and imparted into their consciousness by culture, language, religion, upbringing, and social interactions." [1]

A.Ya.Gurevich groups persistent mental images about the world stressing that ethnic images is formed under the influence of the following concepts: an image of society and its components; relationships between the whole and its parts, individual and collective; the degree of individualization in society, or, alternatively, subsumption of an individual into the social whole; the value of laws and customs and the role they play in the society; the concepts of power, dominance and submission; and the interpretation of freedom [1].

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important to note that all the previously mentioned characteristics determine the character of an ethnic culture, which is reflected in persistent collective archetypes, relationships to the everyday life, a unique material world (objects of material culture) and an agrarian type of production. Ethnic world picture emerges based on these characteristics. It can be described as a system of imagery that creates and establishes a value-based image of 'our own' ethnic group within the mind of its members.

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